GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
RURAL DEVELOPMENT
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:2337
ANSWERED ON:04.12.2001
CONFERENCE ON WATER SUPPLY
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Will the Minister of RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether his Ministry had organised a Conference on the latest technology and environmental cleanliness for rural water supply sponsored by the World Bank; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and the outcome thereof?

Answer

MINISTER OF STATE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI ANNASAHEB M.K. PATIL)

(a) & (b) No, Sir. However, a Conference of State Ministers on Rural Water Supply was held on 19-20 October 2001 in New Delhi. Apart from the representatives from various States and Union Territories, professionals and representatives of External Support Agencies also attended this conference. A copy of the recommendations made by this Conference is annexed.

Enclosure referred to in reply to LSUSQ NO. 2337 for reply on 4.12.2001

Recommendations of the of the State Ministers Conference on Rural Drinking Water held on 19-20 October 2001

A two-day Conference of the State Ministers in-charge of Rural Water Supply was held in New Delhi on October 19-20, 2001 under the Chairmanship of Hon`ble Minister of Rural Development, Shri MVenkaiah Naidu. Minister of State for Rural Development, Shri Anna Saheb M K Patil, Chief Minister from Haryana, Shri Om Prakash Chautala, Lt. Governor from Andaman & Nicobar Islands Ministers in-charge of Rural Water Supply from 16 States, senior officers from the Central and State Governments and representatives from External Support Agencies participated in the Conference.

1. The Conference deliberated in detail on various issues of the Rural Water Supply sector.One of the major issues discussed was the relaxation of norms for coverage of rural habitations with drinking water. The present norms provide for 40 liters per capita per day (lpcd) with a source within 1.6 km in the plains or 100 m elevation in the hills. After detailed discussion, the Conference recommended that once the coverage of all rural habitations in any State is achieved, the norms for coverage may be relaxed to provide for 55 ltrs per capita per day with a source within 0.5 km in the plains or 50 metres elevation in the hills. The concept of community participation was also agreed upon to be adopted in normal Rural Water Supplyprogrammes after full coverage of habitations as per the present norms. In cases, where the service levels are augmented beyond the present norms, 10% of the capital cost and the responsibility of operation and maintenance are to be borne by the community.

2. The need for covering all 1.4 million rural habitations in the country with safe drinking water by the year 2004 as stipulated in the National Agenda for Governance was discussed in great detail.As per the present information available, out of 14.22 lakh rural habitations in the country, 12.45 lakh habitations are fully covered as per the present norms. Most of the States agreed to implement the strategy for ensuring the coverage of all the remaining 18,695 not-covered (NC) and 1,58,675 partially covered (PC) habitations within the stipulated timeframe. Some States, however, stated that they would require additional funds for ensuring full coverage of all partially covered habitations.

3. The State Governments suggested certain modifications to the criteria for inter-State allocation of funds under Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP) to achieve the said objective.It was recommended that in the criteria for allocation of funds to States, the weightage for NC/PC habitations should be increased from 10% to 15% and weightage for quality affected habitations from 5% to 10%. It was also recommended that 5% of the total ARWSP funds be specifically earmarked for meeting contingencies arising out of natural calamities in the Rural Water Supply sector, subject to the condition that the funds left unutilised up to November can be ploughed back into the normal programme thereafter. It was assured that the recommendations of the States would be duly considered.

4. The question whether a fresh survey should be carried out to assess the present status of coverage of habitations was discussed at length. States were in favour of a re-survey of all habitations in all their respective States and Union Territories for making a realistic assessment of the situation.

5. The Minister of Rural Development urged the States to ensure proper and timely utilisation of funds and implementation of RWS schemes. All State Governments agreed to file the necessaryinformation and certificates to release 2nd installment of ARWSP funds by December 2001. Bihar, Jharkhand and Manipur Governments will take earnest steps to furnish necessary details for release of 1st Installment of ARWSP fund for the current year.

6. He called upon the States from the North-East to draw up Special Action Plan for implementation of various schemes under ARWSP to ensure proper development of the region.

7. Water quality, another major issue of concern, was also discussed during the Conference. Shri Naidu directed all the States that the on-going survey of quality-affected habitations should be completed positively by 31.12. 2001 so that the exact magnitude of the problem could be ascertained and an action plan could be drawn up to combat the water quality problem.

8. It was also agreed upon that the concept of dual water supply in quality-affected habitations should be adopted so that treated water up to 10 lpcd for drinking and cooking and untreated water for other purposes could be provided in such habitations.

9. Out of 567 water quality testing laboratories, 352 laboratories still remain to be set up. All States agreed to commission 352 laboratories by 31.3.2002

10. All State Governments except Tamil Nadu and Gujarat agreed to complete the pre-1998 Sub-Mission projects by 31st December 2001.

11. Another major issue discussed at length was regarding the problem of sustainability of water sources. The Conference viewed with concern the rapidly depleting groundwater table aggravated by over-extraction, periodic failure of monsoon in certain regions, ever increasing requirements for an expanding population, desire for higher levels of water supply, mismanagement of water resources and negligence of the environment. The Minister reiterated the need for focussing attention on sustainability measures, like rainwater harvesting, watershed programme, artificial recharge, etc by utilising the prescribed proportion of funds under the ARWSP and Prime Minster`s Gramodaya Yojana (Drinking Water Supply component).In the current year alone, States can avail Rs 256 crore in these schemes for sustainability.

12. The importance of enacting a suitable legislation by the States to regulate the extraction and development of groundwater was also discussed. The Conference recommended that this legislation is necessary to promote drought proofing measures and protection of drinking water sources.

13. It was agreed that there is need to pay more attention to programmes relating to Human Resource Development and Information Education and Communication, computerisation, Management Information System, etc as support mechanism for effective programme implementation.

14. The second day of the Conference deliberated on issues related to Sector Reform projects implemented in 63 districts in 26 States on pilot basis. Government of India have already sanctioned 61 projects with total outlay of Rs 1,820 crore and released the first installment of Rs 484 crore to 58 pilot districts. These projects are the major initiatives introduced in the sector to institutionalise community participation in the RWS programme. Detailed presentations about the Sector Reform principles and strategies, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) as the agency for implementing the project, the World scenario on the rural water supply sector reforms, tools for IEC and HRD and modalities for community monitoring of participatory programes were made.Presentations were also made on the status of implementation of Sector Reform projects by various States and districts.The Conference explored various ways and means to overcome the bottlenecks faced in project implementation.

15. Under Sector Reform Projects, normally, single village schemes are to be taken up, to be implemented by the Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC).However, for multi-village schemes for which the Guidelines provide for similar implementation committees at the Block Level Panchayat Samiti, certain administrative and financial difficulties were envisaged.Since such multi-village schemes and also high cost treatment plants require high investment cost, collection of beneficiary share being very high, becomes rather difficult. Moreover, coordination, implementation, and operation & maintenance pose many problems at the Block Level. After deliberation, the Conference recommended that in case of large multi-village schemes and high cost treatment plants in quality affected areas in sector reform districts, as an alternative, the schemes could be executed and implemented under normal programme by the Government Departments, and water be supplied to individual villages on payment basis at the periphery of each village. Within each village, the storage and distribution network should be constructed by the VWSCs on sector reform principles of capital cost sharing and, thereafter, this network should be operated and maintained by the beneficiaries, for which they should bear the operation and maintenance, including the cost of water purchased in bulk from the Government Department. The Conference recommended amendment in the Guidelines to provide for such an arrangement, as an alternative, in case of multi-village schemes and high cost treatment plants for quality affected areas in the sector reform districts. However, where execution of multi-village schemes through Block Level Committees appears feasible, such schemes could be implemented through Block Committees on sector reform principles.

16. While concluding the Conference, the Minister of Rural Development expressed the hope that the rural water supply sector in the country will progress rapidly with the active involvement and cooperation of all the stakeholders. He specially acknowledged the cooperation and support of UNICEF, Water and Sanitation Programme - South Asia, WHO and DFID, whose representatives were present in the Conference, for the rural water supply programmes in the country.